

Impact of Online Visual Merchandising of Fashion Industry on Generation Z Customers

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Abstract: Online visual merchandising is the act of using visual elements in order to enhance the overall experience provided by online websites. Online visual merchandising is all about creating an exciting and engaging webpage and designing the customer experience with it. There has only been limited number of studies done on online visual merchandising. The purpose of this study is to look into the main factors of online visual merchandising in fashion industry affecting the Generation Z customers. Further, this paper tries to understand the influence of these factors on their consumer behaviour. The data collected through questioners is analysed using regression analysis in SPSS software to derive the main factors affecting the online visual merchandising. The revealed that online visual merchandising has a significant effect on impulse buying behaviour of generation Z customers also three main factors of online visual merchandising are found to be 3D visualisation of the products, the customer experience provided and the easiness of the user interface. If the online marketers focus on improving these aspects in their website, there is a higher probability to attract a customer and a sale to happen thereby increasing the profit of the website. The results of this study will also help the online marketers to identify the strengths and weakness of their e-commerce site.

Keywords: Online Visual Merchandising, Generation Z, Fashion industry

I. INTRODUCTION

Mainstream retailing has shifted over the past few years from traditional shopping channels to e-commerce around the world. With global e-commerce popularity, online fashion sales have also shown remarkable growth over time. Online shopping sites are experiencing high traffic across the globe, the evolution of the internet services in the country also paved way for the increased online activities. Lot of e-commerce websites have been launched within the past few years and they are in tight competition with each other to gain the upper hand in the online market. The fashion sector is one of the most sought after area of interest by the youth (Generation Z) in the whole e-commerce platform. Online visual merchandising is a modern technique employed by the online platforms to gain the attention of the people. Websites offer apparel product visualization feature enabled e-shoppers to select fabric color swatches and instantly see their choice applied to the actual garment image. Visualization features that enabled multiple Presentations of the same apparel product contributed to higher e-business sales. Thus, growth in the e-shopping apparel markets is expected to continue with the introduction of new technologies for product visualization in the following decades. In the 21st century, businesses are embracing technology to run their operation with aim of attracting large customers at minimal cost (Blázquez, 2014).

Application of visual merchandise tools and techniques has accelerated profit generation in fashion industries thus obliging managers to strategize and embrace such technology in daily operations. This paper will therefore research the influence of online visual merchandising of fashion industry on generation Z customers. The tweens and teenagers of today (born between the years 2000 and today) are known as the generation Z. They are largely exposed to new technologies which will influence their purchasing behavior (Paakkari, A, 2016).

Due to the inherent nature of the absence of sensory experience and physical inspection (e.g. fitting, touching) online apparel shopping is still avoided despite improvements (Greenspan, 2003). Approximately 58% of women also complained that they could not see the items well enough to examine the details of the fabric and clothing (What women really want online?, 2001). Another issue that may cause apprehension for online shoppers may be the accuracy of apparel color on the screen. Studies revealed that a good percentage of online shoppers avoided buying clothes from fashion sites because of the uncertainty that exists when it comes to the color. The color of the fabrics delivered is sometimes different from what we order.

Most of the youth are trendy and classy and thus presentation of goods in fashion industry determines whether they will purchase the apparels or not. This implies that visual merchandising experts are obliged to highlight the products, make them appear to be more attractive and visible in order to increase their sales. This can be achieved when visual and physical issues related to products are positioned to unify brand image. In precise, online visual merchandising is responsible for approaching, identifying and ensuring the visual communication between stakeholder and product itself. Therefore, fashion industries are increasingly embracing these new digital systems to innovate and present products in more attractive and professional manners to youthful generation (Chan, Ngai & Moon, 2017).

To meet the needs of consumers for online sensory experience and information, there is a strong need for online visual merchandising techniques to be improved and developed. This would help create the best like traditional retail setting shopping environment. The existing empirical literature on this subject, however, is limited. This study therefore takes an exploratory approach and aims to investigate the major factors affecting the fashion industry's online visual merchandising.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The important aspects of traditional retailing were visual stimulation and communication through various visual merchandising techniques (McGoldrick, 1990; Pegler, 2001). Pegler (2001) defined visual merchandising as a product presentation that communicates with customers product concepts to optimize the sales and profits of products. The behavioral process model developed by Kerfoot et al. (2003) from display to consumption explained the effect of visual merchandising on the psychological and behavioral outcomes of customers in the retail store environment. Previous studies have highlighted the significance of the layout and design of the apparel websites (Allen, 2000; Lindroos, 1997; Then and DeLong, 1999). Then and DeLong (1999) found that through the visual display of apparel, the more information e-retailers can offer, the more interested the consumer will be in buying the product online. Visual displays such as a variety of product angles (e.g. 3-D), image extension, and garment coordination with items can contribute positively to the collection and processing of consumer information.

The online visual merchandising evokes the online consumer's stimuli to make a decision to a certain product over the internet. Visual merchandising aggravates the intentions of the consumers to purchase a particular product or service through various elements which include floor merchandising, window displaying, shop brand name and promotional signage (Le, 2018). In the contemporary world, the retailers have shifted from traditional trading to visual merchandising following the attractive visual elements such as display techniques, colors, and variety of products displayed in the store area (Gudonavičienė and Alijošienė, 2015). Le (2018) carries out a research which was based on the general hypothesis that there is a relationship between the impulse buying and online visual merchandising. This was based on data provided by a particular company's website regarding the bricks and the mortar store. The study included the students, the online customers aged between 18-30 years, and particularly the women since they were the appropriate consumers of company's apparel and the households. The findings revealed that people who would be prompted products over the website when they saw a calling deal. The manner in which the goods are advertised with the descriptions and favorable promotional deals could provoke the consumers to buy the goods even if they had not budgeted for. On the presentation bit, the participants pointed out that the website provided only the two-dimensional display rather than the three-dimensional display which would be more twist the mind of the consumers to make a purchase. It was suggested that videos are one of the merchandising techniques to capture the attention of the buyers. The trend has nowadays been adopted by many companies as one of the effective strategies to facilitate impulse buying behavior. Additionally, the consumers would be encouraged the advertised goods and services if they view the creative audio-visuals that are provided via the websites. Most of the websites will include the audio-videos which explains the purchasing procedure. In overall, the research respondents stated that desirable design, color, music and background would be appropriate to constitute the website environment

and hence these elements would increase their likelihood of making a purchase (Amos, Holmes & Keneson, 2014).

Sundström, Hjelm-Lidholm & Radon (2019) conducted a study the impact of visual digital merchandising on impulse purchasing of the fashionable products. The respondents noted they prefer online shopping since they can browse for the variety of fashions over the website. As a consequence, they may come across elegant fashions that would immediately provoke their minds towards buying such a product or a service. Also, some of the fashions sold online through the merchandising websites are endorsed by the celebrities and the respondents had a feeling that they should purchase the brands that are put on by the well-known people such as musicians or models. Also, some of the merchandising sites have been integrated with social platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Bloggers to market their products and also offer them opportunities for complementarities. In this case, the consumers may purchase a certain product unintended following the positive experiences and reviews on the product (Mehta & Chugan, 2013). For instance, one of the respondents bought a jacket since someone else had bought the jacket and posted the design on the social media (Sundström, Hjelm-Lidholm & Radon, 2019).

Mehta and Chugan (2013) argued that consumer mindset is central to the process of unearthing fashion trends and the implications it has on the immediate environment. Fashion is an expression of the views of the society and the influential members such as the celebrities and brand ambassadors. Youths tend to react to specific outcomes in their immediate environment depending on personal bias. For example, youth with limited experience with controversial fashion statements are unlikely to purchase goods or commodities that draw further attention to them (Madhavi & Leelavati, 2013). That logic applies to youths who are unlikely to purchase revealing clothes or offensive materials due to the limitation imposed by their religion. In other instances, the logic determines the choice of the message that an individual chooses to portray using their fashionable items. For instance, the words used during branding of clothes. According to a research (Hawes, 2015), clothes branded with famous celebrities will attract huge youths to purchase compared with those not branded. Furthermore, trendy designs with positive writings are more likely to sell since most youth affiliate themselves with positivity and optimism approach of life. Such individuals will likely limit their interaction with material that does not reflect their views or opinions. For instance, an individual who believes in the universal nature of specific human rights is unlikely to purchase goods or products that infringe on other people's right since their philosophy does not permit it. In most cases, perceived presentably in the fashion industry, evidenced by the amount of extensive language or products, emanates from several external influences such as technology, music, movies, and religion as the key components behind the increase of profanity in fashion (Madhavi Atel, 2013).

The meaning of different colors is what many fashion designers should be aware of. Different colors have different meanings especially to young generation. Young people in different parts of the world have a different interpretation of colors. Moreover, different colors in fashion industry are meant to have a different meaning. Different cultural groups have different affiliation to colors and thus youth from such cultures are sensitive to before purchasing (Okonkwo, 2016). However, despite the differences that cultures have, color remains a very significant factor in defining who we are in the society. For instance, youth brides' wedding clothes are white to represent purity, innocence and happiness. It would not sound good if the bride chooses a blue wedding cloth (Elliot, 2015). Even in the modern fashion industry, the choice of color plays a very significant role in defining the status of the persons. Psychologically, colors have also become very important. Men and women have a different choice of color. The design of clothes becomes impressive to the persons depending on which color it is. Youths are more impressed by the color of a design thus merchants have to understand their customers' needs since color determines a lot in the choosing of the design. For example, Red color is associated with love and romance. This implies clothes with red colors will sell high during love festive season like valentines. Despite that fashion design may keep on changing year after, colors never change (Kim, 2013; Elliot, 2015). However, the mixture of colors in the design may change to make the design look outstanding and impressive in the eyes of the buyer. This has played a lot of significance in today's market. Moreover, innovation in fashion industry goes hand in hand with the choice of color. The designers are always keen on which color would be suitable for a particular group of youth. The choice of color also differs depending on the Color choice clearly conveys social values. The colors chosen in design should be inclusive and diverse. Diversity is a human characteristic which makes people who they are. It fuels our ideas, behaviors, and perspectives (Bell & Ternus, 2017). Therefore, inclusion through the choice of distinct colors creates an environment where youth differences are identified, respected and valued. Appropriate colors in fashion designs enhance our respect for the environment and others.

While making use of visual merchandising in the online platforms the website design itself plays an important role in fixing the mind of the customer to switch from the brick and mortar shops. The design of the site is one of the prominent element in deciding the satisfaction of the customers in the electronic platforms (Szymanski & Hise 2000). According to the atmosphere of the store, the elements are divided into ambient factors (music, scent, lighting etc), design factors and social factors (Szymanski, M.D, & T.R, 2000). In digital context, design factor is considered as the most influential factor in web based stores. As the windows display is the key factor in attracting customers into the store. Homepage does the same function here in a web based store as the layout of the screen and its design have the closest link to the online sales. (Lohse, G., & P, 1999). On the other hand, search engine is available for easier shopping. The search bars mostly available at the top of the

website. Customers are able to search the desire items through keywords or brand names (in retail stores) without spending too much time on browsing the website. So search engines are essential as they support the customer's search and help to find desired merchandise (Ha, Y. Kwon, W. & Lennon, & S.J. , 2007). Inaccuracy and unclearness of the garment colour, fabric, and detail may prevent E-shoppers from shopping for clothing (Ji & Pang, 2006). So e-tailers need to focus on using 3D product presentation and using different angles for the entire view of the garment to reduce the risk perceived from the online purchase of a fashion product. In addition it would be helpful to reduce the uncertainty of the actual fit and finish of the wear (Khakimdjanova & Park 2005) to allow the customers to create their own virtual models that reflect their own corporeal shape and appearance.

Fashion styles enable youths to express themselves through the types of clothes they wear; this could be based on color, fabric, and texture. Psychologists and scholars assert that a person's fashion style conveys information about his or her personality and attitude towards life. Fashion is mostly influenced by what is trending in the market. Markedly, teenagers and young adults dressing style are influenced by current trends; their hobbies such as love of music; the information they are exposed to on social media platforms such as instagram and influencers such as celebrities (Yan, Bae & Xu, 2015). Customer engagement is vital factor which cannot be ignored. How sales person approach and communicate with young people determines whether they purchase or not. Clear communication, use of informal language and symbols has been reported as best strategy to attract youths in fashion industry. Youths fall under three stylish categories namely relaxed group, creativity and classy group. Online merchandising will influence the youth group in different ways. Relaxed group entails individuals who prefer the casual style that fits well, which give them a sense of comfort. Casual attire includes clothing that cannot fit for formal activities and is related to individuality and not conformity with clothes such as denim, dress shirt, and t-shirts. This is often the most popular style in the school as most people will often wear shirts and well-fitting jeans, which align with most school activities and can be worn in all seasons (Sadachar, Khare & Manchiraju, 2016). Therefore, presenting such clothes in attractive manner will make gen Z to affiliate and express themselves in society. Creativity and grunge style that is common among students who are passionate about style, fashion, and cloth design. This group love clothes that are self-made and indicate that wearers are not afraid of expressing themselves through their outfits. Besides, they show an individual's personality following his or her natural preferences and hobbies. Students in this group would wear clothes that have large images and colors that are conspicuous and do not follow trends. Typical aspects of the creative style include pictures of graphics and celebrity images and the popular use emoji that is frequently spotted on campus.

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Thus online visual merchandising would help youths to embrace the tomboy look, which is worn by people who seek to express a unique aspect of their personality (Sadachar, Khare & Manchiraju, 2016). The last group is the classy and sophisticated, which is portrayed by perfectly fitting, tailored clothes that are outstanding and often express calm, collected, but striking personality. Examples of this fashion style include the chic or sophisticated style that is often trendy. It is characterized by pin-up clothing and flapper dresses and conspicuous make-up among women. This style is influenced by the need to look confident and unique hence, people who prefer this style wear expensive and specially tailored or designer clothes. This group also appreciates sexy clothes that seek to show a person's best body part; mostly, shoulder(s), legs, stomach, or cleavage (Sampaio et al, 2017). The extreme element of this group is the need for sophistication, requires everything at its best quality, and are said not to be content in life. This style is related to official activities and often expresses one's high status and extravagance. The young people on campus, who are high-spirited and love to express themselves through their clothing, exhibit styles that have been defined in this category. Therefore, use of displays, colors and branding in fashion industry will influence how youths wears, their character and purchasing trends. Effective communication in fashion industry will enhance good customer relationship thus helping to promote brand positioning among youths (Sadachar, Khare & Manchiraju, 2016). As result, competitive edge will be realized making industries to generate huge revenues.

Different generations have numerous motives which influence their purchasing behavior. The people born between 1995 and 2015 are known as the gen Z category. They follow Generation Y and the grand children of Baby Boomers, but they are the children of Generation X. Sometimes they are called a connected generation, the digital indigenous people and the net generation. Gen Z works in many ways as consumers have a unique taste, choice, opinion, preferences, position and behavior, so that we understand how they interact, how they learn, how they play with friends, colleagues, their family and brands. The generation Z has grown in a state of technology that is known to be very close to each other (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2015). When placing generation Z on the market, the companies must remember that this target group's preferences change very rapidly and often unpredictably. They have a tendency to be more loyal to the brands that they are consuming compared to older teens who tend to be more skeptical towards brands. Due to the constant exposure of the generation to marketing information, marketing messages which are short or usually in pictorial or video form are preferred by them (Hulyk, 2015, Schiffman & Wisenblit 2015).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Secondary data thorough study provides a framework for initiating information collection and primary data analysis and interpretation. The secondary data are collected from previous literature studies, articles, websites and other

documents published. The primary data was collected through questionnaire method. A sample size of 203 is taken for the study and the sampling technique used is convenient sampling. A convenient sampling is the one of the main type of non-probability sampling methods. In this method, the sample are selected on the basis of availability and easy access. The main reason for selecting this sampling technique is that population is unknown. A questionnaire was prepared and circulated among the Generation Z people to find out the main factors influencing online visual merchandising. SPSS software was used to analyse the factors using regression analysis

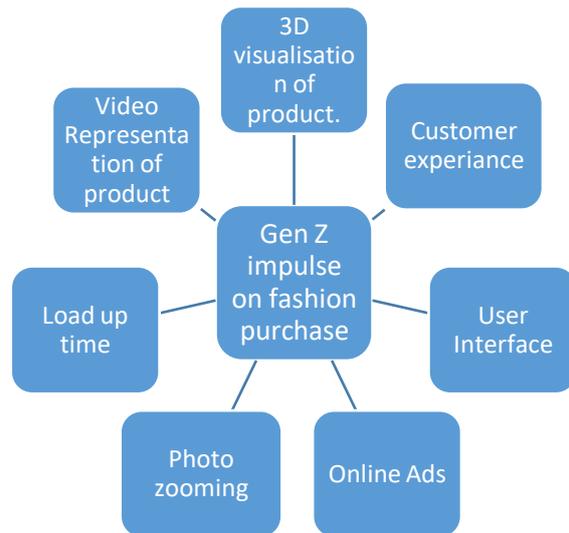


Figure 1: Research model

Research model:

The research model is shown below (Figure 1). Online visual merchandising is affected by the independent as well as the dependent variable. The Dependent variable is the impulse buying behaviour of Generation Z. The independent variables consists of:

- i) 3D visualisation of product
- ii) Customer Experience
- iii) User interface
- iv) Online Advertisements
- v) Photo Zooming
- vi) Load up time
- vii) Video representation

IV. RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

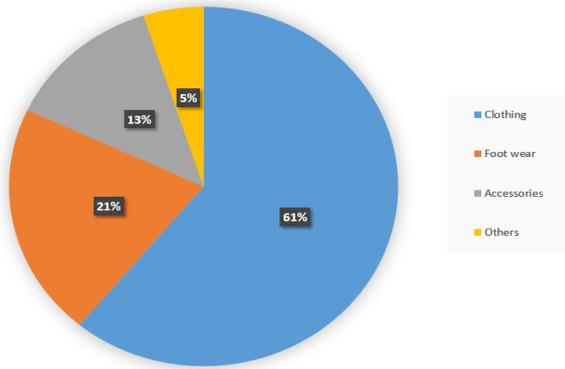


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the purchasing trend of consumers in fashion websites.

It has been found that from the 203 respondents, 61% of the people use fashion site to purchase clothing, 21% of the people purchases foot wear and 13% of people purchases accessories as shown in Figure 2.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.891	8

A. Reliability Test:

In order to get the reliability for further analysis of the data, reliability test is used where an alpha value of .891 is obtained which indicates the data is reliable for further analysis. An alpha value greater than .600 is needed for accepting.

B. Regression Analysis:

Regression was used to find out the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, by regression we can obtain how an independent variable affects the dependent variable and by how much. Regression was carried out by keeping impulsive buying behavior as dependent variable and the various online visual merchandising factors as independent variables.

Table 2

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-286	.150		-1.910	.037
VISUALISATION	.615	.058	.588	10.668	.000
CUSTOMEREXP	.136	.050	.144	2.731	.007
INTERFACE	.137	.052	.129	2.620	.009
ONLINEADS	.136	.068	.121	1.995	.047
PHOTOZOOMING	-.025	.064	-.021	-.390	.697
LOADUPTIME	-.034	.073	-.029	-.468	.640
VIDEO	.110	.067	.098	1.635	.104

Predictors: (constant), 3D visualization of product, customer experience, user interface, online ads, photo zooming, load up time, video representation of product

Table 2 depicts the results of regression analysis from which we can interpret that for every one unit increase in 3D Visualization there will 0.615 increase in impulsive buying behavior. For every one unit increase in customer experience there is 0.136 increase in impulsive buying behavior. For every one unit increase in website interface the impulsive buying behavior increases by 0.137 units and for one unit increase in online advertisements there is a 0.136 increase in impulsive buying behavior. The rest three factors has a p value greater than 0.05 which says that it is insignificant in this study.

a. Dependent variable: Impulsive buying behavior

Table 3

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.867 ^a	.752	.743	.749	.752	84.625	7	195	.0

The correlation coefficient was found to be 0.867 which shows that the variables have high correlation with each other. The coefficient of determination was found to be 0.743 which states that 74.3% variations in the Impulsive buying behavior can be explained by the independent variables.

V. CONCLUSION

From the study it is understood that online visual merchandising has a significant effect on impulse buying behavior of generation Z customers. The factor analysis revealed the most important factors of online visual merchandising of the fashion industry that influences the Generation Z people. The three main factors of online visual merchandising are found to be 3D visualization of the products, the customer experience provided and the easiness of the user interface. So, this study suggests that, if the online marketers focus on improving these aspects in their website, there is a higher probability to attract a customer and a sale to happen thereby increasing the profit of the website.

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